



JOIN THE MEGALAB!

ANNOUNCEMENT

2009 is Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his "Origin of Species". The Megalab, planned for 2009, is to show people: teachers, schoolchildren, amateurs and everybody

who likes nature, the evolution at work. Professional malacologists are not banished, on the contrary – they are absolutely necessary, though they hardly need to be shown evolution. The model animal chosen as the



Fig. 1. A sample from a population of *Cepaea nemoralis* from Kaszuby. Photo. R. A. D. CAMERON



“evolutionary showman” is a snail – *Cepaea*: both *nemoralis* and *hortensis*, but I believe mainly *nemoralis*, because its polymorphism is greater (Fig. 1). The idea is that people who are interested should contribute observations on *Cepaea* polymorphism made near where they live, or work, or spend holidays.

For those who are not familiar with the *Cepaea*-ology: *Cepaea* are unique in making it possible to study genetics without... genes. You don't need to look at their genes molecularly, or through complicated cross-breeding experiments, you look at morph frequencies in a population and they will tell you quite a lot about its genetic composition. All this without killing a single snail. This is why some time ago so many people got interested in *Cepaea*. At first it seemed that the frequencies of colour morphs in populations were purely habitat-dependent, or determined by visual selection by snailivorous birds (song thrush). As often happens, when we thought we knew everything, problems started cropping up. The habitat effect is not always obvious, it may be blurred by historical reasons, bottleneck effect, migration, selection for characters which are not visible but are linked with colour and banding genes, there may be several selection forces operating at the same time but not in the same direction – to name but a few complications. As a result, for a few years there has been a renewed interest in *Cepaea* research. If you want to know more reasons for studying *Cepaea*, read our colleague's recent paper (OŹGO M. 2008. Current problems in the research of *Cepaea* polymorphism. *Folia Malacologica* 16(2): 55–60).

Each of the countries intending to participate in the Megalab has a coordinator – ours is Dr. MAŁGORZATA OŹGO (Institute of Biology and Environment Protection, Pomeranian University; Instytut Biologii i

Ochrony Środowiska, Akademia Pomorska, Arciszewskiego 22B, 76-200 Słupsk, e-mail: ozgo@apsl.edu.pl).

Scoring *Cepaea* populations for polymorphism is impossible without some basic training: how to make sure that the snail is a *Cepaea*, and which *Cepaea* it is, how to look at the shell background colour and how to count the bands, and how to note your results. Once you master a few tricks, it is fun. To learn them, visit the Megalab website www.evolutionmegalab.org and/or contact our coordinator. Scoring *Cepaea* and feeding the data into the Megalab bank will not in any way interfere with publication of your own results in case you wish to publish. And imagine how many data can be collected from all the distribution range of *Cepaea* if at least a few people in each country respond! Maybe you could encourage your students, neighbours, colleagues or families to participate in the Megalab?

The data collecting will officially start on the first of January 2009. Realistically, in our climatic zone, scoring live snails can start only when they wake up in the spring. However, recently I have become convinced that a snowless winter offers the best opportunity to score *Cepaea* (just when other snailing opportunities are very much limited): you simply collect empty shells which are then easy to find, bring them home and score them sitting comfortably indoors. Or you can send such shells to our coordinator, or else to the author of this note, with either long-lat GPS coordinates (the exact site location is important here!) or a map with the site indicated. A habitat photo, though not necessary, would be greeted enthusiastically.

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